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Ten African-Canadian Plays
To Watch (Catch) Thus Far This Century

Opening

This survey article cannot be – and will not be – comprehensive. Worse, it will be impressionistic, in that I will merely list those plays, of which I am aware, that have been produced in this century, usually more than once, while also giving a brief – and cursory – summary of the import and/or meaning of the piece.

I begin by arguing that, in terms of literary criticism, drama provides the best window on a culture. To critique a play is to undertake a cultural vivisection; one finds exposed – suddenly – the brains and guts, the nervous system and the bowels, the heart and lungs, of the community (communion) under examination (or interrogation). To come to comprehend the polyphony of accents, perspectives, and viewpoints that is African-Canada, all one needs to do is look at a few of the plays. My survey will be chronological – by publication. Productions will be noted where germane. My "Decalogue" follows.

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1965: The Captive. This play – the first published by an African-Canadian playwright in English – should not be part of my survey, given that it is very much a 20th-century, Civil Rights-era creation. Written by Trinidad native Lennox John Brown, the play is included here because it was "re-produced," likely for the first time since 1965 (at the Ottawa Little Theatre, the play's publisher), at Memorial University of Newfoundland, in St. John's, Newfoundland, in March 2018. The Captive is not only important because of its premiere position in African-Canadian drama in English, but because of its plot and characters. Although the play is set in the mid-1960s, in Toronto, its black-male-dominated cast reflects – instantly – the multicultural nature of African Canada, but also a multiculturalism that is disrupted by class orientations and by different attitudes toward "integration" versus Afrocentrism and/or Pan-Africanism and/or Black Nationalism. Brown's West Indian and African gents are students en route to becoming bourgeois professionals; the African-American is a fiery activist; the African-Canadian is an affable railway porter – i.e., a laughable, proletarian drunk. Though the four black men collude to kidnap – and terrorize – a white man, supposedly a member of the Ku Klux Klan, their paper-thin unity is torn apart because the African and the West Indian are both lusting after the same white woman, no matter the rhetoric of Black Pride and Black Unity.

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1986: Tightrope Time: Ain't Nuthin' More than Some Itty Bitty Madness Between Twilight & Dawn. Walter M. Borden's one-man show is the signature publication of the African-Nova Scotian (Africadian) ex-teacher and ex-journalist (occupations vacated...
only by paycheque, not by practice), poet, playwright (really poet-playwright), and actor (which is his principal – and principled – livelihood). The play, which is on the verge, as I write, of a fourth, revised edition, is a bit like The Holy Bible or – maybe better – Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass (1855). I make this suggestion because different editions (iterations) of either feature different materials, and, to use the abbreviated title, Tightrope Time has the same evolutionary (or, simply, "evolving") structure, morphing in answer to the shifts in Borden’s political consciousness, social conscience, and ethical conundrums. It began life as a magazine feature, typed up on a then avant-garde (now vintage) IMB Selectric typewriter – in Souvenir font – utilizing the so-ultra-modern, interchangeable ball head. It appeared in a humble publication – Callboard – the house organ of the Nova Scotia Drama League (later Federation), in 1986, on pulp-novel-bad-quality paper (newsprint, more-or-less, and not acid-free).

The production of this script, Borden’s one-man-show text, was an act of cultural guerilla warfare, launched by Astrid Brunner, Callboard’s editor, and her ally, Norval Balch, who snapped the dozen or so photos of Borden (in character make-up and garb) for the original done or so parts. Then a PhD-candidate in English and later a publisher of fine books, Brunner, also an artist’s model, poet, and theatre devotee, knew what she was getting (into) in publishing that original version of Tightrope Time. She was announcing that Black Nova Scotia – African-Nova Scotia, “Africadia” (my coinage) – via a complex heritage of slavery, resistance, segregation, resistance, and possession of Black Atlantic roots in Africa and African America – had produced, in Borden, a consummate articulator of all that jazz, gospel, and down-home rhythm ‘n blues. Tightrope Time is, in part, a semi-autobiography of a seminal saltwater, up-from-the-Roots intellectual, a Jimmy-Baldwinesque “nigger faggot,” and Beat-Greenwich-Village-via-North-End-Halifax-Africville-Soul-Bro’ mash-up of Amiri Baraka (for the Black Power/Black Arts jive) and Allen Ginsberg (for the hip, Queer, chanti and/or rant aesthetic). The play next appeared in Djanet Sears’ seminal anthology, Testifyin’: Contemporary African Canadian Drama, Volume 1 (2001), and then was published – for the first time on its own – by Playwrights Canada Press in 2005. So far, only Borden himself has played the starring role(s), for this one-man show is an exploration of the psyche of an Afro-Métis, African Baptist, Africadian artist-intellectual, familiar with Harlem and Amsterdam (where the play represented Canada at the World Multicultural Drama Festival of 1987), also homosexual and Pan-Africanist. His psyche is a kaleidoscope – collage/pastiche – of types: An "Old Man," an "Old Woman," the "Minister of Justice" (who comments on injustice), the "Minister of Health and Welfare" (who comments on alienation), the "Minister of the Interior" (a black cultural nationalist), the "Minister of Defence" (an activist), a "Pastor," and three transgressive sexual types – a hooker, a drag queen, and a hustler, all whom skewer bourgeois pretensions and hypocresies. The director of this phantasmagoria of characters is "The Host," who is the mature version of a once-traumatized "Child." As of 2018, the play is slated to be published again, again with revisions, beginning with the title. Now entitled, The Epistle of Tightrope Time, the play is now the product of a youngster-in-style, but now veritable old man (Borden turned 76 in 2018). Where once he leaned heavily upon African Americans – Lorraine Hansberry and James Weldon Johnson – for direct quotations and material inspiration, Borden is now much more reliant on his...
own thought and perceptions. It may be time to consider *Tightrope Time* a classic – and to study what younger actors may make of it, to produce a contemporary classic.

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1991: *dark diaspora... in DUB*. Jamaican-born ahdri zhina mandiela published her *dark diaspora... in dub* in 1991, in the same year that the play was first produced by b current, a black woman-centred performance troupe, based in Toronto (ON). The play is actually a series of linked lyric poems, to be spoken, sung, and danced, by six women (described as "chanters"). If this dramaturgy sounds familiar, it should, for it riffs off of Ntozake Shange's "choreopoem," *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* (1977). *dark diaspora* is itself best thought of as a "choreopoem," with its lyric contents sketching black women's herstory from Africa, through the Middle Passage, to the Caribbean, and then to Canada. The "Dub" aspect is best read as the utilization of outspoken and unapologetic political poetry, backed with music. It is a form of poetry and music associated with Jamaica and Black British performers, post-1948. (Think of Linton Kwesi Johnson.) However, here, in her piece, Shange is nudged from Motown and its Afro-Christian context and into a Bob Marley and Rastafarian vibe. mandiela's piece was revived and revised by b current in October 2016; it was restaged under the title, "diaspora Dub."

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1997: *Harlem Duet*. Djanet Sears second play (after *Afrika Solo* [1990]) is a landmark in African-Canadian theatre history. For one thing, it made Sears the first African-Canadian playwright to win Canada's highest award for published drama, namely, The Governor-General's Award for Drama in English (1998). It was also the first African-Canadian play to be produced at English Canada's premiere theatre, namely, the Stratford (Shakespearean) Festival (2006). It has also been oft-produced, and not only in Canada, but in New York City, the home of Harlem. As the title suggests, its principals are two: A black man, Othello, and a black woman, Billie. The characters' race is of mortal importance, for, in this imaginative prequel to Shakespeare's *Othello* (1604), Sears explains Othello's supposedly otherwise inexplicable acceptance of Iago's lethal lies about Desdemona as being the result of a deadly curse (and/or poison) imped upon the Moor by his first wife – and spurned and scorned – wife Billie. The reason for Billie's slo-mo execution of Othello (which will finally occur in Shakespeare's "sequel")? Well, not only has Othello left Billie for a white woman (Mona), he's also used up Billie's inheritance money to help himself unto a doctorate and the professoriate (with a plum post in Cyprus), while denying her any financial assistance for her university tuition and, worse, denying her the possibility of childbearing: He's abandoned her just as she is on the cusp of menopause and after she's had an abortion to please him and then suffered a miscarriage due to his unpleasantness toward her. So, the play stages a dialogue – debate – duet between "integration," which Othello favours, and "Afrocentrism" or Black Nationalism, which is Billie's preference. The stakes are winner-take-all, for Othello's "Oreo" behaviour condemns Billie to impending homelessness as well as to penilessness and childlessness. In contrast, her crypto-fascist belief in something that looks and sounds a lot like (black) eugenics drives her crazily homicidal enough to contemplate pushing an interracial couple (black man,
blonde woman) in front of a Gotham City subway train. Yet, Sears does not allow the audience to make any easy choice between the theses of Othello and Billie. If Othello is "free" to marry a white woman, what happens to the possibility that he could wed—and uplift (into the middle-class)—a black woman and father visibly black children (and, alongside their mother, build up transferable wealth and I.Q. attainment for their offspring)? However, if one adopts Billie's perspective, in the name of race unity and Pan-Africanism/Black Nationalism, one must eschew the blandishments (I pun deliberately) of the Playboy "philosophy," which promotes colour-blind canoodling and enjoyment of bourgeois luxury as most commendable. Billie's world-view is Frantz Fanon applied to recreation, as if there were a chapter in his Black Skin, White Masks (1967) entitled, "The Man of Colour and the Woman of Colour," and not, as in fact there is, "The Man of Colour and the White Woman." One can also read Eldridge Cleaver's analysis of black-and-white sex-and-class divides in America (as expounded in "The Allegory of the Black Eunuchs") profitably alongside Sears' play. Also instrumental in this play is the use of multi-media to bring together different eras of black activism; recorded, conflicting sound-bites (Malcolm X and Martin King, etc.); and music (including the presence of a live jazz combo). Indeed, the play fluctuates among eras—Civil War U.S., the Harlem Renaissance, and contemporary, 1990s-Harlem to emphasize that the debate between "integration" and "nationalism" remains a perennial dilemma. Should a black person seek liberal, individualist fulfilment? Or does one have (should one have) a communal (and thus conservative/conservationist) commitment to the race?

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1997: Riot. Born in Canada's centennial year (1967), and raised in the nation's capital (Ottawa), Andrew Moodie came of age in the English-French-bilingual, multicultural, and liberal (live-and-let-live) vibe of Pierre Elliott Trudeau's Canada. Moodie imbibed enough of that Geist to strike the nation's conscience with Riot (1995), a play whose first line, "Fuck Quebec!", was like a guerrilla bomb tossed into a bourgeois mansion, given that it was uttered at the very moment that 49.1% of Québécois were about to vote to leave Canada and set up their own country. Well, the "separatists" lost that vote (narrowly), but Moodie's Riot seized the moment and won the day by presenting an urban Canada—Toronto—more fractured by race and class in 1992 than by language, but where the debate about Québec becomes part of the allegorical machinery related to injustice. If Francophones are oppressed by Anglophones, blacks are oppressed by whites throughout the country, including in supposedly progressive Québec. (So explosively "relevant" was the play in 1995, that Canadian Broadcasting Corporation TV dedicated a portion of its nightly newscast to broadcasting the opening scene and offering an analysis of its import.) In addition, in moves reminiscent of Lennox Brown's Captive, Moodie's six-person cast explores the homophobia, sexism, and classism of many members of the sextet, though they are tenants in the same rooming house. They may all be black; they may all experience racism; but they are all black in exceedingly complex and contradictory ways, and not necessarily accepting of each other, ultimately. So, the play ends with a Queer thug, grabbing his phallic gun and skedaddling to the U.S. (reversing the Underground Railroad), while yet another character, more bourgeois Romantic in inclination, throws himself on his back, in the grass, looks up at the stars, and waxes very schmaltzily and movingly about the sexy cool chic of—yes—P.E.T.
Although I could not find any production history for this play in this century, I will assert that *Riot* is too important to omit from this survey, even if its sole production was by the Factory Theatre (in Toronto) in 1995 and even though Moodie has written other plays that have been produced. Indeed, I would set *Riot* beside Sears’ *Adventures* as being a play that is also trying to establish the links among blackness, Canada (history, geography, politics, sociology, including criminology), and African American struggle. *Riot*’s title refers both to the 1992 Los Angeles race riot protesting the acquittal of white police for the beating of black motorist Rodney King and the sympathy [echo] riot in Toronto, versus police “brutality,” that was very Canadian in that it featured a multiracial cast of looters, all chanting “Remember Rodney King” as they smashed windows and made off with VCRs and SONY Walkman-type devices. Moreover, one must note that African-Canadian plays are often welcomed with acclaim, and then are permitted to vanish into obscurity, given that Canada has no deathless commitment to black art and/or achievement. The exceptional African Canadian artists are those who become superstars in the United States. These “happy few” (Shakespeare) are never permitted to become ephemera. So, for this reason too, dear reader, I ask you to look up Moodie’s *Riot*.

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1999: *Angélique*. Lorena Gale’s *fin de siècle* play, produced as recently as 2003 at Hart House Theatre (Toronto, Ontario), takes up the true, historical account of colonial Canada’s best-known slave woman, namely, Marie-Josèphe Angélique (d. 1734). A native of Madeira, Angélique was accused of an arson that destroyed a goodly swath of central Montréal, Nouvelle-France (now Québec), then gruesomely tortured into a “confession,” then hanged, and her body burnt at the stake, and her ashes thrown into the Saint Lawrence River. Herself a bilingual Montréal native, Gale excavates the biography of the slave woman and the history of slavery in colonial Canada to lay bare the patriarchal sexism that forced Angélique to bear children – capital/property – for her white master as well as for black “studs” and to also expose the labour exploitation of Indigenous and African peoples, but also of white peasants and of white women by white male aristocrats. Gale dexterously juxtaposes elements of 18th-century and 20th-century society, to make the point that the racism, sexism, and classism of “then” is still apparent “now,” though contemporary workers may be immigrants and liberalism and multiculturalism work together to obscure the pernicious persistence of ugly oppressions. The play ends with a prophecy that, as black people multiply in Montréal (or Canada), only then will there be an opportunity for real equality and true justice.

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1999: *Consecrated Ground*. Born in 1950 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, George Elroy Boyd was a teenager when the 150-year-old settlement – village – of Africville was torn apart – piecemeal by piecemeal – bulldozed to the ground between 1964 and 1970. Just as Marie-Josèphe Angélique is the best-known (colonial) Canadian slave because of her alleged epic crime and her definite Gothic end, so is Africville the best-known Black Canadian settlement, because its church was desecrated by bulldozers and the community disrespected by being taxed for, but not receiving, essential services such as water and fire protection. Indeed, waste pick-up wasn’t necessary in Africville because the City of Halifax located its garbage dump right on the doorsteps of Africville.
homes, so that the villagers had to dispense rat poison instead of refuse bins. No wonder, then, that Boyd opens his teleplay (the first version of *Consecrated Ground*, circa 1992) with a close-up shot of a rat and a background shot of a bulldozer: The City of Halifax had weaponized urban planning by unleashing biological warfare against Africville by setting the dump – an emporium for vermin – right beside the black community. Also in the teleplay, as in the later play (first version, circa 1996), Boyd treats us to a landscape of sterility (or frigidity), – winter ice, snow, the dump. His true hero is a heroine, the main protagonist, Clarice, or Leasey, who, as the play begins, has a baby boy asleep in a crib. But under these Eliotic, *Waste-Land* conditions, the babe is subject to frost-bite and rat-bite, and is soon killed by the latter – and so, slain indirectly by Halifax's urban planning. Having ancestral and natal ties to Africville, Leasey is insistent that her dead son be buried in the hamlet, but her husband, Willem, who has married into the community, accepts the Haligonian propaganda that casts Africville as 'a slum by the dump.' He credits the media perspective that damns Africville as a symbol of segregation that must be destroyed to spur on racial integration and support a new urban plan that would see a second bridge span Halifax’s harbour at what was then called "Negro Point." So, while his wife campaigns to see her infant son’s body interred in the frozen ground of wintertime Africville, Willem – as household head – signs away their home and land (that is to say, Leasey’s family home and ancestral land) to the City of Halifax. His decision suits liberal, individualist expediency, but at the cost (pun intended) of sacrificing his wife’s conservative agrarian and maritime, communal (communitarian) values, including that of local burial in the people's cemetery. Due to Willem’s "betrayal," Leasey – already childless – will soon be homeless, landless, and husbandless, for she tells Willem to leave when she finds out about his literal 'sell out' of her home and her values. Though she succeeds in burying her son, Tully, in the cold ground of the churchyard, while Reverend Miner (a Machiavellian character whose name should be spelled "Minor"), intones a prayer, her victory is desperately, consummately pyrrhic: The bulldozers will take her home and house, just as the rats have taken her son. No longer fertile, she cannot hope for another child. Although Boyd does not clarify whether there’s any chance for a rapprochement between Leasey and Willem, the tragic arc of the play has greater force if – as in Shakespeare – there is no new generation available to carry on. Published in 1999, *Consecrated Ground* earned Boyd a Governor General’s Award nomination for best Drama in English in 2000. Its first production was undertaken by Eastern Front Theatre in 1999 and then it was revived in this century by Obsidian Theatre in 2004. The play's concentration on a landed or grounded identity that conflicts with the floating signifier that is the capitalist consumer has a counterpart thematic in Sears’ *Adventures*, just as Leasey vs. Willem is a replay, ideologically, of the contest between Billie and Othello in *Harlem Duet*.

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2002: *The Adventures of a Black Girl in Search of God*. Djanet Sears’ third play is another landmark in African-Canadian theatre, becoming the first Black Canadian play to break out of the "ethnic ghetto," so to speak, and break records for attendance and ticket sales. First produced by Nightwood and Obsidian Theatres, in 2001-2002, it was then picked up by the A-list-oriented Mirvish Productions and staged at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre in 2003-04. In between the premiere and the second production,
the play was published. Adapting her play's title from George Bernard Shaw's collection of short stories, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God (and Some Lesser Tales)* (1932), Sears doesn't seek to spoof Christianity (as does Shaw in his titular story), but to allegorize the African-Canadian (native-born and immigrant) search for roots and belonging – an at-oneness with Canadian geography and history – that geography that can be so forbidding and that history, of African-Canadian presence, that is so forbidden. Being a Black British-born dramatist, Sears nods to the great modernist and socialist-inclined playwright Shaw, but she also riffs off African-American antecedents (which is a typical move for all African-Canadian writers (see my article, "Contesting a Model Blackness" [1998, reprint 2002]), such as Sam Greenlee's novel, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969), which also features subversive blacks who become "invisible" in white society by pretending to be menial or casual labour (cooks, cleaners, maids). Sears also seems to echo (or mirror) Julie Dash's film, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), with its mysticism-infused evocation of the Gullah culture of the South Carolina sea isles as an originally untainted (industrialism and capitalism), natural Eden. (So, Sears' play concludes with a mother eating dirt and then making love to her husband beside a creek.) The vibrant use of colour and of actors to represent elements could be a comfortable interface with Ntozake Shange's feminist and influential play, *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem* (1977). There are references, too, to Spike Lee's film, *Bamboozled* (2000), which catalogues, in its conclusion, a massive garage-sale, so to speak, of exaggerated "blackface" or minstrel-related knickknacks, dolls, figurines, toys, souvenirs, and "novelty" items. In Sears' play, all such gags and gewgaws are liberated by a nocturnal army on the prowl for Sambo lawn ornaments and the like, to reclaim these disparaging *objets* and replace their oversized, Bozo-the-clown grins with dignified, civil smiles. Certainly, the central argument of the play is that Black Canadians – born-and-bred or come-from-away – erase the negative depictions of blackness in Canada (even if masked as genteel comedy), contest the erasure of black presence in history books and maps, and implant (I use this verb very deliberately) – in such a deep, profound manner – the *place* (I pun on this noun) of blackness in Canada, as lived and as historical experience, that it cannot be uprooted. This political-philosophical struggle has a class aspect, a gendered dimension, and a generational divide. Indeed, one way to digest *Adventures* is to consider it as a disguised blackening *cum* eroticization of that Canuck, *über*-cultural-mainstay, namely, Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* – to name the trifecta of book (1908), stage musical (1965), and movie-and-tv-series (1985). (There's also a theme-park near Charlottetown, PEI, plus a museum.) Just as the redhead, freckled Anne is the Pipi Longstocking of country-and-western-Romantic, (Caucasian) Anglo-Canuck culture, so is Sears' "black girl" the symbol of harmonization and unification with the fertile (black) earth of rural, black-settled Ontario. But what makes Sears' signification incendiary is that she is claiming Canada as a black-people's space, thus flouting two centuries of propaganda extolling it not as only "white," but even attempting to negate (while definitely repressing) the Indigenous peoples. The play was most recently produced in 2015 by both Montréal's Centaur Theatre and by Ottawa's National Arts Centre.

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Anthony's debut play, showcasing again the intra-group multiculturalism of African
Canada, and set in a black woman-oriented beauty salon in Toronto, was such a major
success, that it was – like Sears' Adventures – picked up by Mirvish Productions in
Toronto in 2005 and turned into a box-office smash. That success led, in turn, to a
Vision Television 1-hour pilot and then a weekly TV series that ran for twenty-six
episodes over two seasons on the Toronto-based Global Television network in 2007
and 2008. Not only that, but the play was produced in both San Diego and London –
yes, that London, the original. In the piece, Anthony utilizes the patented, polyphonic,
black multicultural cast (some born or raised in Canada, others having West Indian
background) – thereby fleshing out her subtitle – that one sees in Brown, Sears, Moodie,
and, arguably Borden (given his multi-character-playing, solo actor). Like Sears and
Borden, Anthony also revels in an African-American interest and it is to be found here
as it is for Sears (in Adventures), Ntozake Shange's for colored girls who have
considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem (1977). Shange's play
ends: "I found god in myself&amp; I loved her/I loved her fiercely," and the seven-lady-
spectrum, a septet, repeats the couplet, singing until they form a "tight circle." Well, if
Shange's play concludes with a gesture favouring multiracial liberal feminism,
Anthony's ends with a "celebration of Blackness" – of black womynism (to coin a word)
– with the female cast performing "an African dance," while chanting, "I've been
wearing black all my life." One can imagine Sears' Billie shouting the same line at her
ex-hubby, Othello, and so Anthony's play exudes the identical black-womyn-uplift
rhetoric of Harlem Duet's Billie. We also read, at the end of Anthony's play, that the
"womyn" inhale and then exhale as they heal each other (of self-hatred for their black
skin and "kinky" hair). There's an obvious connection here to the first mainstream
Hollywood film to attract black women filmgoers explicitly, namely, Forest Whitaker's
Waiting to Exhale (1995), which was adapted from Terry McMillan's novel of the same
title (1992). The major difference here is that Toronto is not Harlem or South Central
L.A.: It is not a black "ghetto" composed mainly of African Americans with a
smattering of Latinos. Instead, it is multicultural and multiracial, so that the women
entering into the beauty salon derive from the furthest swathes of the African Diaspora.
That is not to say that they avoid issues of sexism, sexual assault (including incest),
white racism, intra-group "colourism" or "shadism" (discrimination of light-
complexioned blacks against those of darker tint), as well as class cleavages that may be
aggravated – literally – by the accent(s) that one adopts. It is to say that the conflicts
can never be played as only a matter of "race" or "colour."

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2013: Shakespeare's Nigga. Joseph Jomo Pierre mirrors Djanet Sears' achievement in
Harlem Duet by plotting a play derived from Shakespeare's imagination, but updated
pointedly, poignantly, or perversely, to present the proud Moor Othello and the sable
villain of Titus Andronicus, namely, Aaron, as archetypes of Malcolm X's demonology
and hagiography. Thus, Shakespeare himself is a slave master, with a loyal "house
slave" (to employ X's terminology) who is in love with Judith (W.S.'s haughty, hot-
blooded daughter). However, Judith despises Othello, who she views as too much an
Oreo – yellow-bellied, lily-ivered, despite his black skin. Instead, she lusts for the

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plantation's bad boy, the "field slave" *(pace X)*, Aaron, who's never met a white throat he hasn't wanted to cut or a book that he hasn't wanted to burn. Othello tries to tame Aaron via torture, but only hardens Aaron's will to rebel. In the meantime, Judith finds that Aaron, as a "hard" black man, is a good find for her bed, and soon she is impregnated. When Othello learns that Judith has been taken by, or has given herself to, Aaron, he sets out to slay the renegade, but he is too late. Aaron has now roused all the slaves to revolt and claim their liberty and to torch the Big House and its library – Willy Shakespeare's favorite abode. Yes, this plot-turn upsets The Bard of Avon, but he respects Aaron for being a black macho, a hard-ass, while Othello, in contrast, is a bit of a "limp wimp", so to speak: Aaron is the "nigga" punk; Othello is the nerdy intellectual. Meanwhile, Judith, regretting that she is fornicated and whelped a black bastard, wants to murder her new-born, but Aaron stabs her to death instead. One might want to consider this play as just a tad influenced by the "Blaxploitation" drama, *Django Unchained* (2012), directed by Quentin Tarantino, which presents Django as a John Shaft character who can kick a lot of white butt and then ride off into the dawn with his Ebony Queen of a wife. (Personally, I believe that *Django Unchained* served as wish-fulfillment for African American audiences who were sick and tired of President Barack Obama always trying to make nicey-nice with the Republicans instead of whacking their pseudo-racist butts as much as humanly possible.) Though Pierre's play has been produced just once, by Theatre Passe Muraille and Obsidian Theatre, in February 2013, the Trinidadian-Canadian actor and playwright follows both Sears and George Boyd in having seen his play nominated (in 2013) for a Governor General's Award in Drama.

**Closing**

I hope that this review of ten African-Canadian plays staged in this century will whet appetites to seek them out, try them, digest them, and, first, to swallow them whole as "live" productions. While the playwrights are all Black Canadian, they derive from the African Diaspora – to Britain (Sears), to the Caribbean (Brown, mandiela, Anthony, Pierre), and to Canada (Borden, Boyd, Gale, Moodie). While African-American literature and culture are influences for most Canadians, Ntozake Shange's danced play, *for colored girls...* (1997), is the major intertext for many, with even Shakespeare serving only as a runner-up. The particular brilliance of African-Canadian drama is that it is polyphonomous, deploying voices and accents from the whole of the African Diaspora and its positions and development in Canada. Arguably, the most produced dramas are also those with the smallest casts, ranging from Borden's single-actor (but multiple-character) piece, up to Sears' *Harlem Duet*, with its focus on a couple, plus three side characters. (Sears's large-scale and epic *Adventures* is an exception.) A few of the plays have crossed international boundaries, but most are produced in Canada – when (and if) at all. Moreover, most of the plays have been published by three presses: Blizzard and Sirocco and Playwrights Canada Press. Furthermore, very few of these plays are chronically produced, and both Moodie's and mandiela's deserve to be only provisionally present in this 2000-on review. However, three of the ten – as publications – have received nominations for Canada's highest award for print drama and one – Sears' *Harlem Duet* – won. Two plays – Anthony's and Sears' *Adventures* migrated to commercial stages and Anthony's *du Kink* even crossed over to television. I think it is fair to say that my sampling
here is representative of the excellence of African-Canadian playwriting. The fault lies not in ourselves that our plays are not produced more often.

Speaking for myself, now, I'll note that I have had five plays produced in this century: Whylah Falls: The Play (staged 1997, 2000, and 2002 – this last production was conducted in Italian translation – in Venice, Italy); Beatrice Chancy (performed as staged readings in 1997, 2009, 2011); Québécité (staged 2006); Settling Africville (staged 2014). One play – East Coasting; or, Make It Beautiful – was performed for CBC Radio (2004). Three operas have been staged: Beatrice Chancy: The Opera (1998, 1999, and 2001, when it also played on CBC Television); Québécité: A Jazz Opera (2003 – twice); and Trudeau: Long March/Shining Path (2007, 2010). Scenes from all three operas have also been performed, hither and thither, with music by James Rolfe (Beatrice Chancy) and dd Jackson (Québécité and Trudeau: Long March / Shining Path; – we actually won a national competition in 2003 to score [pun intended] the moolah to kick-start the writing of Trudeau.) All of my plays and libretti have been published, except for East Coasting and Settling Africville (though the latter has been selected for a theatre anthology and should appear, published, in 2019). My latest published play, The Merchant of Venice (Retried) (2017) may yet become an opera too; but, first, I pray, it'll be staged. Here's the G.E.C. "dramatic" bibliography:


Curtain

Works Cited


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